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Regular process for global reporting and assessment of the state of the marine environment, including socio-economic aspects

Second International Workshop

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report provides an account of the main developments that occurred during the second International Workshop on the regular process for global reporting and assessment of the state of the marine environment, including socio-economic aspects, held in New York, from 13 to 15 June 2005. The Workshop was convened in accordance with paragraph 86 of resolution 59/24, by which the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General "to convene the second International Workshop on the regular process for global reporting and assessment of the state of the marine environment, including socio-economic aspects, from 13 to 15 June 2005, with representatives from States, relevant organizations, agencies and programmes of the United Nations system, other competent intergovernmental organizations and relevant non-governmental organizations, to continue considering issues relating to the establishment of the process, including the scope of the process and a task force to initiate the start-up phase, the 'Assessment of Assessments'".

The second International Workshop considered the provisional agenda (A/AC.271/L.1) and had before it a note verbale dated 8 June 2005 from the Permanent Mission of Iceland addressed to the Secretary-General (A/AC.271/1).

* A/60/50 and Corr.1.

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I. Introduction

1. The World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 agreed, in paragraph 36 (b) of the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg Plan of Implementation),[1] to establish by 2004 a regular process under the United Nations for global reporting and assessment of the state of the marine environment, including socio-economic aspects, both current and foreseeable, building on existing regional assessments. The General Assembly later endorsed that paragraph in paragraph 45 of its resolution 57/141 and requested the Secretary-General to prepare a report on modalities for the global marine assessment (GMA) (A/58/423).

2. It is recalled that in paragraph 64 (a) of its resolution 58/240, the Assembly had requested the Secretary-General to convene a group of experts comprising representatives of States, including all regional groups, and representatives from intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations, including scientists and policymakers, to produce, including by possibly hiring a consultant, a draft document with details on the scope, general framework and outline of the regular process, peer review, secretariat, capacity-building and funding. The Group of Experts met from 23 to 26 March 2004 and issued a draft report (A/AC.271/WP.1). In accordance with paragraph 64 (b) of the resolution, the report was transmitted by the Secretariat to States and relevant intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, scientific associations, funding mechanisms and other parties, for written comments and for indication of specific issues to be addressed in the first assessment.[2] The comments received are contained in document A/AC.271/WP.2 and Add.1 and were also posted, in extenso, on the website of the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea, including the additional comments, which were sent after the deadline for publication.

3. Those documents constituted the basis for discussions at the first International Workshop on the regular process for global reporting and assessment of the state of the marine environment, including socio-economic aspects, which was convened, in accordance with paragraph 64 (d) of Assembly resolution 58/240, to further consider and review document A/AC.271/WP.1.

4. In paragraph 86 of resolution 59/24, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to convene a second International Workshop to consider issues related to the establishment of the regular process, including the scope of the process and a task force to initiate the start-up phase, the "Assessment of Assessments".

II. Second International Workshop

5. The second International Workshop was held from 13 to 15 June 2005 at United Nations Headquarters. The Director of the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea, Office of Legal Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, opened the meeting.

6. Delegations approved the provisional agenda and elected by consensus John Roberts of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Head, Marine and Waterways Division, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, as

Chairman of the Workshop. Mr. Roberts had been designated as the Coordinator of the informal consultations of the first International Workshop.

7. Mr. Roberts introduced the Legal Counsel, Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, who made a brief statement on the importance of the work of the second International Workshop. The Legal Counsel stated that States viewed the regular process as an important issue. They saw a need for a scientific assessment of the state of the marine environment as a basis for rational decision-making and ocean management that could play a role in sustainable development by protecting the marine environment and conserving its resources in order to contribute to food security and help to eradicate poverty. He also mentioned that although Member States attached great importance to the regular process, unfortunately, there had been no agreement on how to deal with the issues discussed during the first International Workshop. He concluded by underscoring that more information was needed regarding the state of the oceans in order to address such questions as the degradation of the marine environment, and the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity.

8. The second International Workshop had before it the non-paper prepared by the Coordinator of the informal consultations at the first International Workshop. The second International Workshop began its work by reviewing a series of questions posed by the Chairman and proceeded to its deliberations in accordance with the mandate it had received from the General Assembly, as set out in its resolution 59/24.

9. The second International Workshop agreed to recommend to the General Assembly, for its consideration on how to proceed with the "Assessment of Assessments", the conclusions of the Chairman (see annex), which reflect the deliberations of the Workshop.

Notes

[1] *Report of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, South Africa, 26 August to 4 September 2002* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.03.II.A.1), chap. I, resolution 2, annex.

[2] Correspondence dated 7 and 12 April 2004 was sent by regular mail, fax and/or e-mail to Permanent Missions to the United Nations, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations.

Annex

Conclusions of the second International Workshop on the regular process for global reporting and assessment of the state of the marine environment, including socio-economic aspects

1. The second International Workshop on the regular process for global reporting and assessment of the state of the marine environment, including socio-economic aspects, considered the start-up phase, the "Assessment of Assessments", as a preparatory stage towards the establishment of the regular process provided for in the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg Plan of Implementation)[1] and General Assembly resolutions 57/141 and 58/240, including the scope of the process and a task force to initiate the start-up phase.

Features of the "Assessment of Assessments"

2. The second International Workshop reached the following conclusions about the nature of the "Assessment of Assessments":

(a) The "Assessment of Assessments" is not intended to alter the competence of any other organization to undertake marine assessments within its field of competence. It should respect the sovereign rights and jurisdiction of coastal States over maritime zones under their jurisdiction, in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. It is not intended that the "Assessment of Assessments" should make recommendations about the management of human activities that affect the oceans. Other competent authorities should draw their own conclusions about the implications for the management of activities within their fields of competence;

(b) The "Assessment of Assessments" should be essentially science-based. It should not require any original scientific research or any new marine observations but will involve the integration of existing scientific and technical data and information;

(c) In accordance with paragraph 36 (b) of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, the "Assessment of Assessments" should cover assessments of the state of the marine environment, including socio-economic aspects. The latter might include, for example, existing assessments of underlying trends in the employment in and the economic value of activities affecting the marine environment but should not encompass policy evaluations. Time, resources and professional judgement will determine the range of activities that can be covered;

(d) The "Assessment of Assessments" will not involve making any new assessments about the state of the oceans or about the state of any particular component. It is intended that it should bring together and review existing assessments;

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[1] *Report of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, South Africa, 26 August to 4 September 2002* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.03.II.A.1), chap. I, resolution 2, annex.

(e) The "Assessment of Assessments" will need to acknowledge uncertainties: there may be gaps in scientific knowledge and in data and these should be identified.

Aims of the "Assessment of Assessments"

3. The second International Workshop recommended that the aims of the "Assessment of Assessments" should be to:

(a) Assemble information about assessments relevant to the regular process, which have already been carried out under the purview of United Nations bodies and global treaty organizations, regional organizations, national Governments, and by any other relevant organization, where appropriate;

(b) Make a constructive appraisal of those assessments, for example, by comparing methodologies, data sources and coverage, in order to identify, collate and synthesize best practices in assessment methodologies and to identify what thematic and other gaps and uncertainties exist in current scientific knowledge and assessment processes;

(c) Establish how those assessments have been communicated to policymakers at the national, regional and global levels.

4. Given the data and assessments that the group of experts, proposed in paragraphs 5 and 11 below, finds to be relevant to the regular process, and based on its evaluations, it would produce a report within 24 months to the ad hoc steering group, described in paragraphs 5 to 8 below, including identification of:

(a) Assessments available on the marine environment and an evaluation of their potential contribution to the regular process;

(b) Data available and how that information might be incorporated into the regular process;

(c) The usefulness and constraints posed by organizing assessment components of the regular process on different scales;

(d) How organizing assessment components on different scales could relate to integrated assessments;

(e) What gaps exist and their implications for the regular process;

(f) The need for capacity-building to support the regular process; and

(g) A framework and options for building the regular process, including potential costs.

Organizational arrangements

5. The second International Workshop envisages that the "Assessment of Assessments" might take about two years. The second International Workshop considered the organizational arrangements for that period and recommended that:

(a) An ad hoc steering group be established;

(b) One or more United Nations agencies take a lead role;

(c) A group of experts be established.

It is important that developing countries be adequately represented within the ad hoc steering group and the group of experts.

6. The second International Workshop recommends that the Assembly establish an ad hoc steering group to oversee the execution of the "Assessment of Assessments".

7. The composition of the ad hoc steering group should include:

(a) Nominees of Member States, on an equitable geographical basis and ensuring an adequate range of expertise;

(b) The following United Nations bodies: UNEP, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, International Maritime Organization, Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO, World Meteorological Organization and International Seabed Authority.

8. The functions of the ad hoc steering group should be to:

(a) Agree on a proposed staged work programme for the "Assessment of Assessments";

(b) Organize an open-ended midterm review to provide to all Members States of the United Nations, in particular those States not represented on the ad hoc steering group, with the opportunity to comment on and contribute to the development of the ongoing work carried out under the "Assessment of Assessments"; and

(c) Give guidance to those carrying out the work, if required.

9. One or more United Nations agencies should be appointed to take a lead role in executing the "Assessment of Assessments", under the guidance of the ad hoc steering group. That agency or agencies, in addition to contributing to the work in accordance with their own mandate, should provide secretariat services to the ad hoc steering group and coordinate the work in collaboration with all United Nations bodies, organizations and programmes.

10. In the view of the second International Workshop, the Assembly should invite UNEP and the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO to undertake jointly the role of lead agency or agencies.

11. The lead agency or agencies should establish a group of experts to undertake the actual work of assessing the various assessments. The composition of the group should be approved by the ad hoc steering group.

Finance and resources

12. The second International Workshop noted that many organizations and United Nations bodies are already engaged in marine monitoring and assessment work and that they would therefore be able to contribute their experience and results to the "Assessment of Assessments" process.

13. It is recognized, however, that there will be some additional costs, including for the ad hoc steering group, the group of experts, the midterm review, the peer review and publications, for which financial resources will need to be found.